



Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue  
in the City of New York

The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, OBE, DD, *Rector*  
John Scott, LVO, D. Mus., *Organist and Director of Music*  
[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

**Sunday, September 4, 2005**  
*The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost*

*Choral Eucharist*  
*at 11am*

+  
A Sermon by  
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector  
on  
Romans 12:9-21  
+

### *HURRICANE KATRINA*

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good... Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Last Monday it seemed the winds of Hurricane Katrina were not as high as predicted and that New Orleans, at least, had escaped the worst. But when the levees broke and the floods came by Tuesday night, things really changed.

On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, scenes that looked liked nothing most Americans have seen or known began to show on television and were described in the papers. A great, charming and beloved old city filled with water like a bowl, and all its residents, 500,000, became refugees. "New Orleans," said a chef who cooked in the French Quarter, "is Atlantis, the lost city; nature took it back."

The 100,000 residents too poor, infirm, heedless, or otherwise unfortunate to obey the orders to evacuate before the storm have been subjected to scenes that would easily fit in Dante's *Inferno*. The dead, estimated at first in the hundreds and more lately to the thousands, at least were spared what awaited the living. In the words of eyewitnesses, hundreds were stranded in fetid water up to their necks. Many tens of thousands were driven to despair and disorder amidst the filth, stench and heat of the Superdome.

Then there were the things that alarmed and outraged many fellow citizens as we watched – the breakdown of civil order, the looting, the thuggery and the preying on the weak by criminal elements; and the apparent helplessness of government to impose order and to rescue the victims. Scenes from the biblical Books of Genesis and Revelation seemed immediate rather than mythic or apocryphal, as the media coverage shifted from flood scenes to human panic and failure. It is a truly historic catastrophe.

Normally when I prepare for my sermons I refer to biblical commentaries. My earlier sermon, which would have been on today's Gospel and therefore on church discipline, handling variances and such things as slander and gossip, will have to wait. There is always time for such perennial matters. This week, I was taking notes on the newspapers. By the weekend, thank God, it appeared that the government was beginning to impose order and relief would be more coherent

and, just as important, *seen to be coming*. The question before us is, how, in a situation of such massive need, can we “let our love be genuine”?

The whole Gulf Coast seems devastated, but knowing people and particulars gives focus to outreach. The Episcopal Bishop of Louisiana is a clergy associate and friend of mine.<sup>1</sup> His headquarters and cathedral were in New Orleans, on Seventh Street, and have been ruined. He is a faithful, hard working, able man, who by midweek had the Diocese’s headquarters set back up and running 70 miles upstream in Baton Rouge, at St. James Church. I have been in e-contact with him and phone contact with his secretary. Understandably, the Bishop is, in his own words, “overwhelmed just now.” His diocese, which has 55 parishes and missions, has seen 18 (one third) of its churches destroyed (15 of which were in New Orleans).

Nearby where the Bishop and diocesan headquarters are now in their long-term, perhaps permanent, relocation, at neighboring St. Luke’s Church, Baton Rouge, the Rector<sup>2</sup> is my priest friend who was able to tell me some things which I would like to share with you this morning. He and the Bishop both said it lifted their spirits when I asked, What can we at Saint Thomas do to help? The short answer is, Send money. I will get back to that, after I tell you what my priest friend told me.

Baton Rouge, the capital of Louisiana, has suddenly also become the state’s largest city and may stay that way. It has more than doubled in population (from a quarter to over a half million) over the past week, filling with all sorts of people, high and low, rich and poor, from New Orleans and environs. “There’s nothing left down there [in New Orleans],” my priest friend said, “nothing functional in the city. Most of it seems to be moving to Baton Rouge.”

At Saint Luke’s, for example, the parish school of 250 has just taken on 100 children which it did not have last week. [A similar but gigantic crisis looms for the Baton Rouge public schools.] Again at St. Luke’s, where most parishioners have suddenly taken on lodgers who were among the self-evacuated before the flood, there are the families of 40 newborn babies who were in intensive care in New Orleans and are now in the Baton Rouge hospital next door to St. Luke’s. These families are sleeping on the floor of the Parish House, while their infants are brought into this world.

My priest friend and his wife were in Honduras when the hurricane hit. They were somehow able to get back to Houston on Tuesday and Baton Rouge the next day. I asked him what he was going to say in his sermon this morning. He wasn’t sure, he said, and I had the feeling he was going to have to do without a manuscript, but what he did say to me will suffice as good preaching.

St. Luke’s, Baton Rouge, is a southern “cardinal parish.” The Bishop himself is a former rector. “After years of helping elsewhere, now the need is right at our door,” said my friend, “and we need to understand that it is Jesus who is knocking. As in, ‘I was a stranger and you took me in.’”

He went on. “We are going to have to remain open to strangers who aren’t just passing through. And these include many of those who were in New Orleans with no hope and future, and are now here, with the same old problems and are now dislocated as well.” One other thing he said, which he pressed upon me: “Andy, you need to know that there are many wonderful things going on and being done, many good Gospel things.”

I told you I would get back to money. For now, we are dedicating our loose offerings at Saint Thomas, at least for the next three weeks, to Hurricane Relief. In addition, checks may be made out to Saint Thomas Church earmarked Hurricane Relief. This money will go to the

---

<sup>1</sup> The Right Rev’d Charles Jenkins, Bishop of Louisiana.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev’d Brian Koehler, Rector of St. Luke’s Church, Baton Rouge, LA.

Episcopal Relief and Development Fund, which is directly channeling money to such folks as the Diocese of Louisiana. If in due course it seems good to make more immediate contributions to the Church there, we will do so. For now, this is the advice I have from good priests who are right there and who know the scene well. So let us pray for all who are suffering from this appalling disaster. The immediate call (and the best theology too) is to let our love be genuine. We have fellow citizens, fellow church members down there. Let us hear the words of Christ when he vindicates the righteous at the Last Judgment: “When I was hungry, you gave me food; when thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was a stranger, you took me in; when naked, you clothed me; when I was sick, you came to my help; when in prison, you visited me... Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me.”<sup>3</sup>

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

---

<sup>3</sup> St. Matthew 25:34-37; 40, New English Bible paraphrase.